United Nations A/C.5/53/SR.42

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

Official Records

Distr.: General
6 January 1999

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 42nd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 10 December 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Abelian ..... (Armenia)
later: Mr. Armitage (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Australia)
later: Mr. Abelian (Chairman) ..... (Armenia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

Contents

Agenda item 111: Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors *(continued)*

Agenda item 113: Programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999 *(continued)*

Financial arrangements associated with the dining room at the International Court of Justice

Integrated Management Information System project (continued)

Relationship between the treatment of perennial activities in the programme budget and the use of the contingency fund

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/53/L.66 concerning agenda item 45

Consolidation of technical secretariat servicing of intergovernmental bodies

Letter dated 29 October 1998 from the President of the General Assembly addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee

Agenda item 123: Financing of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission and the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola

Agenda item 112: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations *(continued)*

Other matters

Organization of work

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

98-83726 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 111: Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors *(continued)* (A/C.5/53/L.16)

Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.16

1. **Mr. Mazemo** (Zimbabwe), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.16 on financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors, said that, owing to the importance of the reports in question, the Committee's consideration of them could be neither cursory nor postponed until the resumed session. The Committee had therefore decided, in informal consultations, to recommend action that would allow the Board of Auditors, the Secretariat and the specialized agencies to pursue their work unhindered. Paragraph 5 of the draft resolution should be revised to read, "Approves all the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, subject to the comments thereon contained in the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions". That paragraph contained the main decision of the draft resolution, while paragraph 7 gave the General Assembly the option of returning to the issue at its resumed session.

2. *Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.16, as orally revised, was adopted.*

3. **Mr. Herrera** (Mexico) said that paragraph 5 of the Spanish version of the text should be corrected to reflect the oral revision.

4. **The Chairman** said that all language versions of the text would be revised accordingly.

5. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that his delegation looked forward to further discussion of the issues involved, including that of the frequency of audits and reporting in the case of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Agenda item 113: Programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999 *(continued)*

Financial arrangements associated with the dining room at the International Court of Justice (A/C.5/53/L.17)

Draft decision A/C.5/53/L.17

6. *Draft decision A/C.5/53/L.17 was adopted.*

Integrated Management Information System project (continued) (A/53/7/Add.7, A/53/573 and A/53/662)

7. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), introducing the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the forward-looking study of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) conducted by independent experts (A/53/662), said that he regretted the misunderstanding concerning the formal introduction of the report; there had been no intention to pre-empt the discussion of the report by the Committee. Because the Secretary-General's tenth progress report on IMIS (A/53/573) could not be considered separately from the report of the independent experts, both reports had been referred to in the introductory statement on IMIS delivered by the Under-Secretary-General for Management, even though the latter report had not yet been issued in all the official languages at the time. The report had been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 52/227, paragraph 12. Paragraphs 11 and 13 of that resolution referred also to the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which was currently in the final stage of preparation and would be issued together with the Secretary-General's comments. Unfortunately, the note transmitting the report of the independent experts did not mention that the Secretary-General's comments thereon were contained in the tenth progress report on IMIS (A/53/573).

8. The report of the independent experts highlighted the fact, which had been largely overlooked thus far, that IMIS was not only a technological undertaking but also a major reform process, since it had an impact on the vast majority of the Organization's administrative practices. Moreover, its value in supporting the reforms introduced by the Secretary-General was increasingly recognized. When the IMIS project had been launched, no commercial system meeting the Organization's operational requirements had existed, nor had such a system been developed in the interim. The integrated approach followed by the United Nations since 1990 was in line with current industry trends.

9. The independent experts had identified the shortcomings that had made the development of IMIS difficult, including the lack of a corporate information technology plan for the Secretariat, the continuous lack of adequate internal staff, the gross underestimation of the level of effort required for report-writing, and delays in setting up operations support within user offices. The experts had made three types of recommendations, which were reflected in annex II to the tenth progress report: recommendations requiring urgent action by the Secretariat (recommendations 1, 2, 3 (in part), 4 and 9), which had been undertaken within existing resources and which were in line with concerns expressed by the Board of Auditors and the General Assembly; recommendations requiring the preparation of budget estimates (recommendations 3 (in part) and 6), which would not be implemented unless the General Assembly

approved the necessary budgetary resources; and recommendations requiring further studies or the completion of activities that were already ongoing (recommendations 5, 7, 8, 10 and 11) which would be implemented on the basis of General Assembly decisions. Thus, none of the actions already taken at the recommendation of the independent experts would interfere with the normal decision-making process of the Organization's governing bodies. With the exception of the additional funding for transitional assistance recommended by the experts, the requests for funding contained in the Secretary-General's tenth progress report were in line with the strategy outlined in the ninth progress report (A/52/711). Most of the funding requested was for three major tasks: the implementation of IMIS at offices away from Headquarters; the development of reports, which was one of the main recommendations of the Board of Auditors; and the completion and implementation of payroll.

10. *Mr. Armitage (Australia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

Relationship between the treatment of perennial activities in the programme budget and the use of the contingency fund (A/53/7/Add.9; A/C.5/52/42)

11. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) introduced the Advisory Committee's report (A/53/7/Add.9) on the report of the Secretary-General on the relationship between the treatment of perennial activities in the programme budget and the use of the contingency fund (A/C.5/52/42). In paragraph 3 of its brief report, the Advisory Committee listed some of the types of perennial activities that had been included in programme budgets, based on information provided by the Secretariat. In paragraph 4, it recommended that the General Assembly should take note of the report of the Secretary-General, and stated its view that any problems in the interpretation of what constituted a perennial mandate should be settled by the General Assembly.

12. **Mr. Schlesinger** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and, in addition, Liechtenstein and Norway, said that annex I to General Assembly resolution 41/213 clearly stated that the programme budget should include expenditures related to political activities of a "perennial" character whose mandates were renewed annually. Activities that related to special rapporteurs and other fact-finding and investigative bodies established periodically pursuant to resolutions and decisions adopted by the Commission on Human Rights and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council, as well as activities of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, fell within the concept of "perennial" activities. Provision for those activities should therefore be made in the context of the proposed programme budget. Following the adoption of resolution 41/213, that procedure had already been proposed in the 1988–1989 programme budget and since then had been approved by the General Assembly. Indeed, it had been standing practice ever since.

13. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that her delegation had participated actively in the negotiations that had resulted in the delicate political balance reflected in section III, paragraphs 74 to 82, of General Assembly resolution 52/220. The Secretariat, in its budget proposal for the biennium 1998–1999, had proposed that resources should be allocated for the activities of various country rapporteurs even though the General Assembly had authorized those activities only for 1997. That had represented a serious violation of the budget process established in General Assembly resolution 41/213, especially with regard to the use of the contingency fund, and had contravened the letter and spirit of resolution 42/211. Paragraph 79 of section III of resolution 52/220 clearly indicated that the Secretariat could not use the resources allocated to non-mandated activities of special rapporteurs until the General Assembly had considered the report currently before the Committee (A/C.5/52/42). Had the Secretariat respected the prerogatives of the General Assembly, it would not have used such resources until the Assembly had taken the relevant decisions.

14. Since the biennium 1988–1989, there had been a kind of "mini-contingency fund" for the programme budget section on human rights which the Secretariat had tried to justify on the grounds that the activities in question were perennial. Neither the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/52/42) nor that of the Advisory Committee (A/53/7/Add.9) analysed in depth the relationship between perennial activities and the contingency fund. The principles underlying both of those reports implied that resolution 41/213, including its provisions on the use of the contingency fund, should be revised completely.

15. In line with the philosophy of those two reports, the Committee should add to certain budget sections, particularly those in the economic field, a given level of resources for future mandates, since there were no activities more perennial than those to promote economic development in developing countries. The violation of resolution 52/220, the negotiation of which had focused on ensuring the full implementation of resolution 41/213, affected the Fifth Committee's credibility and introduced an element of

distrust into the negotiations that would be needed on the subject. She requested that the Secretary-General's report should be discussed in the context of informal consultations on the first performance report for the 1998–1999 budget.

16. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that he associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. General Assembly resolution 41/213 clearly defined the relationship between perennial activities and the use of the contingency fund. The table in the annex to the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/52/42) illustrated the perennial nature of the activities in question. He agreed with the Advisory Committee that the General Assembly should take note of the Secretary-General's report.

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/53/L.66 concerning agenda item 45 (A/53/734; A/C.5/53/45)

17. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the Advisory Committee's report (A/53/734) on the statement submitted by the Secretary-General (A/C.5/53/45), said that, in the last sentence of paragraph 4 of the Advisory Committee's report, the phrase "1998 estimates of the salary costs" should be corrected to read "1998 estimates or the salary costs". In adopting draft resolution A/53/L.66, the General Assembly would request the Secretary-General to continue efforts to seek a durable solution in Afghanistan, and would extend the United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan (UNSMA) until 31 December 1999. The Secretary-General's statement indicated that an appropriation of $4,007,700 had been authorized under section 3 of the programme budget for the Mission's operations in 1998; since expenditure for 1998 was estimated at approximately $3.7 million, an unencumbered balance of $332,300 would remain.

18. The Secretary-General had proposed a new structure for the Mission which would increase the number of posts from 44 to 82; 40 of those posts would relate to the establishment of a new civil affairs unit. The estimated cost of extending the Mission's mandate until 31 December 1999 was $7,399,600 gross. However, for the reasons indicated in paragraphs 8 and 10 of its report, the Advisory Committee recommended, in paragraph 16, that an additional appropriation of $5,896,200 should be authorized under section 3. An additional amount of $412,100 would also be required under section 32, to be offset by the same amount under income section 1.

19. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that his delegation would like the Secretariat to provide written clarification of a number of points. First, he wished to know the nationalities of the persons to be assigned to work as human rights monitors in Afghanistan. He was concerned that persons from the countries directly involved might be assigned to such posts, and believed that only persons from neutral countries should be assigned to the new civil affairs unit to ensure the efficient, effective and impartial functioning of the Mission. He also asked where the monitors would be based. Regarding the last preambular paragraph of draft resolution A/53/L.66 A, he asked why the Commission on Human Rights had not investigated the murders of Taliban prisoners that had taken place in May 1997. He also wondered how much money had been provided to the Commission for that purpose. Lastly, he asked what amount had been allocated to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and how many visits the Special Rapporteur had made to Afghanistan in 1998 for the preparation of his reports.

Consolidation of technical secretariat servicing of intergovernmental bodies (A/53/452)

20. **Mr. Riesco** (Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the consolidation of technical secretariat servicing of intergovernmental bodies (A/53/452), said that the integration of the secretariats of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and most of their subsidiary bodies, together with conference-servicing units, into the new Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services had led to greater coordination and cooperation, had made it easier to set priorities between Committees and had facilitated the allocation of resources to service all the bodies, resulting in improvements in the secretariat's functioning. The new arrangement had been in effect for less than 18 months, and consultations on its efficiency had concluded that the experience with the new arrangement, though positive, was too limited to propose any changes at the present time.

21. *Mr. Abelian (Armenia) resumed the Chair.*

22. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that the topic should be kept under review by the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly under the agenda item on reform, and that the Secretary-General should advise the Committee of any relevant developments.

23. **The Chairman** suggested that the Committee should recommend that the General Assembly should take note of the report, with the understanding that the Secretary-General

would keep it informed about the implementation of consultations on technical secretariat servicing of intergovernmental bodies, as deemed necessary by either the Committee or the Secretary-General.

24. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said she understood that to mean that the matter would remain open for review by the Committee and, when appropriate, in the context of consultations on the Secretary-General's proposal for reform.

25. **The Chairman** said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to recommend that the General Assembly should take note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/452) and that it would revert to the issue as necessary.

26. *It was so decided.*

Letter dated 29 October 1998 from the President of the General Assembly addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/53/31)

27. **The Chairman** drew the attention of the Committee to a letter addressed to him by the President of the General Assembly (A/C.5/53/31), transmitting a letter from the Chairman of the Sixth Committee concerning the observations submitted by the International Court of Justice in response to paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 52/161. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to take note of the letter.

28. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 123: Financing of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission and the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (A/52/799/Add.1; A/53/722)

29. **The Chairman** drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General on the financing of the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA) (A/52/799/Add.1).

30. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/53/722), said that, for the period from 1 July to 31 December 1998, the Advisory Committee had recommended an amount of $43.6 million, corresponding to $10.9 million per month. The General Assembly, by its resolution 52/8 C of 26 June 1998, had appropriated an amount of $45.9 million, including $2.3 million for the support account. For the period from 1 November 1998 to 30 June 1999, the Secretary-General was requesting an additional appropriation of $87.2 million gross, equivalent to $10.9 million per month.

31. Although recent experience would seem to suggest a lower level of resources than that requested by the Secretary-General, the Advisory Committee had taken account of the overall deteriorating situation outlined in the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council, and had concluded that the best course of action would be to grant the resources requested. In paragraph 15 of it report, the Advisory Committee recommended an additional appropriation of $87.2 million gross for the period from 1 November 1998 to 30 June 1999, subject to the renewal by the Council of the Mission's mandate.

Agenda item 112: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

More coherence for enhanced oversight in the United Nations system (*continued*) (A/53/171/Add.1)

32. **Mr. Connor** (Under-Secretary-General for Management), introducing the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "More coherence for enhanced oversight in the United Nations system" (A/53/171/Add.1), said that ACC had noted that the JIU report provided a useful comparative assessment of oversight mechanisms in use within the United Nations system, and that the reference value of the information contained in the annex to the report was particularly helpful. It had also noted that many of the relevant suggestions and recommendations of the report had either already been implemented or featured in their plans for the future.

33. Recommendations Nos. 1 and 2 mirrored the recommendations of the Secretary-General in his report on enhancing the internal oversight mechanisms in operational funds and programmes (A/51/801), specifically those contained in paragraphs 44–51 thereof. Some members of ACC, while sharing the thrust of recommendation No. 1, had stressed that, in view of the distinct character of each of the organizations of the system, it would be counterproductive to call for the same internal oversight model for all organizations. While agreeing that there should be full transparency about the issue, organizations had emphasized that responsibility for internal oversight was primarily that of the executive heads of organizations. With regard to recommendation No. 2, some ACC members had been concerned that moves towards a more common, system-wide format for reporting could increase the costs and/or complexity of existing reporting arrangements at a time of staff shortages and budgetary constraint.

34. Most member organizations had supported recommendation No. 3, a recommendation to highlight good practices in oversight reports, which remained an important component of the ongoing lessons-learned analysis in the areas of peacekeeping and humanitarian affairs. Some ACC member organizations had been of the opinion that the most effective and appropriate way of disseminating good practices in oversight, as in other areas of system-wide concern, was by the continued use of the ACC sub-machinery.

35. Concerning recommendation No. 4, some members of ACC had been of the view that the proposed JIU analyses of consolidated annual summary reports, involving an additional layer of reporting, had doubted that that would be the most cost-effective way of enhancing system-wide efficiency of oversight.

36. Recommendations Nos. 5 and 6 had generally been supported by the members of ACC, subject to reservations about the need to maintain the confidentiality of certain organization-specific data and concerns as to the cost-effectiveness of some of the initiatives suggested in paragraph 103 of the report. ACC had noted that the existing arrangements for meetings of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation and meetings of representatives of internal audit services already contributed to that process.

37. He also wished to bring to the Committee's attention a procedural concern: the JIU report had been submitted for the Committee's consideration without the comments of ACC on the report. The procedure provided for in article 11, paragraph 4 (e), of the statute of JIU required that a JIU report should be submitted to the General Assembly only in conjunction with the comments of the Secretary-General or ACC, prepared within the established framework. The logic of that provision was that the Committee should have the benefit of the executive comments on a JIU report to allow for an informed consideration of it; submitting a JIU report without any executive comments on it might leave the Committee unaware of any differences in views and assessments that might exist in specific issues between JIU and the subject of its report. There must be strict compliance with the procedures established by the statute of JIU and the General Assembly.

38. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan), noting the comment of the Under-Secretary-General that the JIU report should have been introduced in conjunction with the report of ACC, said that, while the item was important, it was not time-sensitive, and yet it was being dealt with hastily. The Committee should not conclude its general discussion of the item, but should hold informal consultations during the resumed session of the Assembly in order to examine the report.

39. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that her delegation agreed with the representative of Pakistan; given the importance of the topic, the Committee should resume consideration of it at a later date.

40. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that the report contained a very thoughtful commentary on the JIU recommendations on oversight issues. He agreed with the view of ACC regarding recommendation No. 4; there was sufficient reporting and analysis already. He would like to hear an elaboration of the view of ACC expressed in paragraph 7 of the report that continuous pressure for the provision of information through internal oversight reports gave impetus to increased micro-management. He could understand that agencies felt that they were being constantly bombarded with requests for information from oversight, but wondered why that would reduce the effectiveness of oversight.

41. **The Chairman** said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it the Committee wished to conclude its general discussion on the report at the present stage, and that it would continue its discussion of the report or of any other reports it deemed necessary at any time convenient to its programme of work.

Other matters

42. **The Chairman** recalled that, at the 39th meeting of the Committee, the representative of Cuba had voiced her concern, in principle, regarding the presentation of oral reports by the Chairman of ACABQ. At that meeting, it had been agreed that, before taking a decision on the matter, the Committee would invite the Chairman of the Advisory Committee to give his views.

43. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Committee used three methods of reporting in its work. It submitted written reports; it had its Chairman report orally to the Fifth Committee; or it sent a letter to the Secretary-General or to the heads of funds and programmes, which was subsequently attached to the relevant report submitted to the General Assembly or to other intergovernmental bodies. Of the 80 reports reflected in the first report on the work of the Advisory Committee during the fifty-second session, 6 had been oral. Of the 72 reports issued by ACABQ since the beginning of the fifty-third session, 12 had been oral.

44. It was not possible for the Advisory Committee to lay down guidelines for the submission of all its reports. The

decision to submit an oral report was made by the Advisory Committee on a case-by-case basis and took into account many factors, including the fact that its recommendations did not relate to complex subjects, did not involve large expenditures or were procedural in nature. However, the Advisory Committee was often forced to report orally even on complex subjects with large expenditures, owing to the need to abide by the scheduling of items before the Fifth Committee and the plenary meetings of the General Assembly. The latter factor was frequently resorted to towards the end of the regular session of the General Assembly. All oral reports of the Committee were subsequently published as official documents of the General Assembly.

45. In recent years, the number and frequency of oral reports to the General Assembly had decreased considerably. It would be counterproductive to determine beforehand in the Fifth Committee how ACABQ should submit its reports. Like other subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly, the Advisory Committee was master of its working methods. Therefore, any demand that it should always submit written reports would be inappropriate; it could also lead to considerable delay in the conduct of the work of the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly. The Advisory Committee had adopted very flexible working methods in order to increase its productivity in the face of great pressure from a heavy workload and very tight deadlines. He hoped that no action would be taken to impair its ability to perform its work for the General Assembly and the other intergovernmental bodies to which it reported.

46. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that the growing importance of administrative and budgetary questions and the mobility of delegations made it even more important to maintain institutional memory through the presentation of written reports. Her delegation therefore proposed that all the reports of the Advisory Committee should be presented as stipulated, namely, in writing and in the six official languages. Should there be any justified reason preventing such presentation — of which the General Assembly should be informed at the time the respective report was presented — on an exceptional basis, the Committee would agree to accept the report in its oral form, provided that a written copy of the oral presentation was distributed at the same time. The report should then be distributed to all delegations without delay, as an official document and in all the official languages, thereby giving delegations all the necessary background information.

47. **Mr. Schlesinger** (Austria) said that the statement of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee serve as a guide for the Committee in its negotiations on the pattern of conferences, during which the proposal of the representative of Cuba should also be considered.

48. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that it was not the Committee's intention to impair the decision-making process of ACABQ, and it should not take any decision affecting that process. Sometimes, for unavoidable reasons, the Advisory Committee was forced to make an oral report and the Fifth Committee had to take a decision on that basis because of the time constraints. Since it was important to have something in writing, the Committee might follow up the Cuban representative's proposal, but it should avoid taking a formal decision under the item on pattern of conferences.

49. **Mr. Tommo Monthe** (Cameroon) said that the issue was not a very important one and the Committee should not spend much time on it. In difficult years, such as years of transition or reform, the pressure of work was enormous. But when the Committee was working under normal conditions the question under discussion never came up. When the Chairman of the Advisory Committee gave an oral report, it was usually on a fairly simple issue, although sometimes on a difficult but very urgent one. If delegations had difficulty with an oral report, they could obtain a copy of the report in writing before taking a decision. The Committee needed to proceed pragmatically: no trend had in fact been established, but it could return to the issue if matters worsened. At the present stage there was certainly no need for the Committee to lay down the law to any other body.

50. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that he agreed with the representatives of Pakistan and Cameroon. The Committee should note the information given by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee, but no formal decision was needed. He was sure that, as in the past, the Advisory Committee would circulate a report in writing whenever it was requested to do so.

51. **Ms. Brennen-Haylock** (Bahamas) said that the Committee must be careful not to take a decision which would impair the usefulness of the Advisory Committee's contribution or its own ability to work effectively. She would be grateful if the Chairman of the Advisory Committee could indicate the time-frame within which the oral reports were published. Perhaps that process could be speeded up.

52. **Ms. Powles** (New Zealand) endorsed the comments made by the representative of Cameroon and subsequent speakers. She was confident that the Advisory Committee had the best interests of the Fifth Committee at heart. Her delegation preferred to let the matter rest as it was.

53. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that there were two types of oral reports of the Advisory Committee. The first consisted of statements by the Chairman on large expenditures which were subsequently submitted to the Fifth Committee in writing. The other consisted of very simple oral statements by the Chairman, especially on programme budget implications; such reports were covered in the summary records and were later compiled and issued as documents of the General Assembly. The problem was that, since the 1996–1997 biennium, summary records had been taking almost a year to appear. In the past they had appeared within two or three weeks, and delegations could quickly see a summary of the oral reports of ACABQ before they were published. Perhaps the Secretariat should look into ways of speeding up the issue of the summary records and the compilations of the oral reports of ACABQ.

54. **The Chairman** said that it should be borne in mind that ACABQ was not a subsidiary body of the Fifth Committee but of the General Assembly and that it had to examine other reports on funds and programmes. The issue should be approached with frankness and honesty: the delay in the publication of summary records affected all the Main Committees and was due to a cost-cutting decision taken in resolution 50/215. Oral reporting by ACABQ was a separate issue. As its Chairman had just said, all oral reports were eventually published. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee always submitted as many written reports as possible and responded quickly to requests for an oral report to be circulated in writing. He did not think that the Committee should be spending so much time on the issue; now was perhaps not the right time to discuss it.

55. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that she agreed with the Chairman of the Advisory Committee that the situation had become more difficult since the 1996–1997 biennium. She also noted the comment of the Chairman of the Fifth Committee on the need for frankness and honesty. In fact, the issue had arisen out of a concern for frankness and honesty in resolving the problems created when reports of the Advisory Committee, and indeed of other bodies and the Secretariat, were not delivered in writing. If now was not the right time to discuss the issue, she wondered when would be the right time. All delegations were agreed that the situation had worsened recently. However, she did not wish to prolong the discussion. Perhaps in the light of the comments by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee and the statements of delegations, the Fifth Committee would be able to take a considered decision at a later stage, without affecting the procedures of ACABQ, with a view to facilitating its own work and that of the General Assembly.

56. **The Chairman** said he had meant that he did not wish the Committee to take a hasty decision which it might later regret. The legitimate concern of delegations about oral reports of ACABQ had been noted. The issue needed to be considered in a broader context, including the problem of summary records, for example. He suggested that the Committee should return to the issue at an appropriate later date.

57. *It was so decided.*

Other matters

58. **Ms. Emerson** (Portugal) said that, during the discussion of the financing of the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone, several delegations had noted the very high cost of air travel from Italy to Sierra Leone. In connection with the Advisory Committee's report on standards of accommodation for air travel (A/53/7/Add.10), she would be grateful if the Secretariat could produce a conference room paper for the resumed session indicating the cost of air travel at the best available rates for economy and business class, broken down for General Service staff, the P-1 to P-5, D-1 and D-2, and Assistant Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General levels, and showing the distribution between the regular budget and the peacekeeping budget.

59. She also understood that staff entitled to home leave could opt either for a ticket to their home country or for 75 per cent of the value of the ticket in cash. She would like to know what proportion of staff members took the cash option.

60. **The Chairman** said that the request would be dealt with by the Secretariat.

Organization of work

61. **The Chairman** said that, in the light of the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 85th plenary meeting, the Committee would have to complete its work by 15 December. He called upon all delegations to cooperate in an effort to meet that deadline.

62. **Mr. Tommo Monthe** (Cameroon) said that the Committee needed to show good sense in dealing with each of the items still under negotiation. The time had come for compromise. Given a spirit of compromise, the Committee could finish its work by 15 December. Delegations must, however, cease trying to get everything they wanted in a draft resolution and agree to take the middle road.

63. **The Chairman** said that he thoroughly endorsed the comments of the representative of Cameroon. Delegations

should come to the informal consultations willing to compromise on it.

64. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that he, too, endorsed the comments of the representative of Cameroon. However, the Committee would have to hold many informal meetings, including some at the weekend. He appealed for consideration to be given to the needs of small delegations, which could not attend an endless series of meetings without a break.

The meeting rose at noon.